

# Washington where now

An adventurous food crawl plus what's on stage

LOCAL FLAVOR

## A Taste of Shaw

BY KELSEY B. SNELL

It's about time Shaw had its moment. Once neglected in the wake of 1968 riots, the zone now swells with energy between 7th and 9th streets. The variety of flavors found in the new restaurants and niche bars here befits the onetime bustling mix of merchants, theatergoers and streetcar riders who traveled through this center of African-American culture. Now the city's 19th-century melting pot has become a cultural crossroads once again.

Here's where to head if you're looking for...



## CASUAL VIBES

**1** Washingtonian Thor Cheston opened **Right Proper Brewing Co.** beside the restored Howard Theatre in December. His priorities? “Hospitality comes first; beer and food, second,” says Cheston, who plans to open a “hospitality suite” above the taproom to lodge visiting brewers. Foodies find a menu with bar bites (try the Virginia ham biscuits) plus wood-grilled entrees, and beer lovers come for the low-gravity pours by brewmaster Nathan Zeender as well as guest taps from local breweries like DC Brau. Nearby in a converted garage, family-friendly **SUNdeVICH** offers baguettes inspired by international cuisine like the “Mexico City,” with ham, avocado, eggs, tomato and chipotle butter (below), served from noon till ingredients run out (or 9 p.m.). Other chill neighborhood stops include cash-only **Ivy & Coney** for Detroit- and Chicago-style hot dogs, cheap beer and Cracker Jacks as well as **Nellie’s Sports Bar** with its deck and the ever-popular Sunday Drag Brunch.



SUNdeVICH

## GLOBAL FLAVORS

**2** Central European **Bistro Bohem** has become a gathering place for Shaw’s Czech expats who crave a taste of home: the national dish of braised pork with sauerkraut and dumplings or *slivovitz* (plum brandy), the national spirit. Film nights co-hosted with the Czech Embassy happen in the adjoining **Kafe Bohem** where by day experienced baristas serve Viennese espresso and strudel. At the sleek, new **Mandalay**, diners come for flavor-rich “gourmet” Burmese: small plates (sprouted yellow pepyoke, salads like pork-and-cucumber) and big (spicy

three-chili pork, beef with cilantro). Special: chef’s “whim” seven courses upstairs. Continuing the world tour? Ethiopian *injera* at **Etete** arrives like a painter’s palette topped with traditional tibs, and at **Dunya**, the rustic ambiance, fine wine, cheese and charcuterie entice as do Mediterranean dishes like Blue Bay mussels in a white wine-saffron sauce and pistachio cheesecake for a sweet finish.

## CHIC AND SEASONAL

**3** Chef Tom Power shows his true colors—namely go-go poster neons—at the new **Baby Wale** next door to his high-end Shaw institution **Corduroy**. The antithesis of its sibling, Baby Wale opts for simple dishes like chilled soups and prosciutto pizza, even a hot dog with fries. But expect sophisticated entrees as well inside this playful space with communal tables, Power’s own D.C. concert posters and a makeshift chandelier. At **Table**, chefs cook French-inspired dishes in full view of diners while answering questions and displaying mysterious ingredients to those seated at close-up high-tops. The menu, handwritten in composition notebooks, lists Burgundy wines and French farmhouse ales plus dishes like pork belly with lavender, whole dorade and the brunch special “B.L.P” (bacon, lettuce, persimmon) sandwich. At **Thally** “modern American” restaurant, find the Shaw Cider with hopped cider, gin, orange and grenadine made in house.



Dickson Wine Bar



Derek Brown at Mockingbird Hill



Eggplant caviar at Table

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## DEREK BROWN AND A FINE COCKTAIL

**4** He mused in *The Atlantic’s* beverage column, made cocktails at the White House and pioneered the local mixology scene (The Passenger, The Columbia Room). And now, maybe his greatest feat yet, Derek Brown has opened three bars at once.

It all started with sherry. As an anthropology buff, Brown became fascinated with the wine’s history and visited small-batch makers in southwest Spain before opening **Mockingbird Hill**. The first of his three neighboring bars, it’s headed by sherry expert and wife Chantal Tseng. Most patrons check their workday ego at the door and sit in front of Tseng ready to be schooled. Flights (from \$12) come with food pairings (walnut brittle to olives) but, according to Brown, go even better with ham—the other specialty of the house. At neighboring **Southern Efficiency**, whiskey reigns (peanut soup too), but jarred cocktails like the “Blackstrap & Switchel” deserve some cred: Blackstrap rum, apple cider vinegar, maple syrup and ginger, a spiked

switchel, aka the “farmer’s Gatorade.” A hallway connects to **Eat the Rich** where heavy metal music sets the tone for no-pomp wines, pitcher cocktails and a sea feast of briny Chesapeake oysters, clam chowder and a brunchtime boil.

## LOW LIGHTS

**5** Come 5 p.m. at the tucked-away **Dickson Wine Bar**, a glowing wall of wine bottles illuminates the two-level space (left). Patrons come to the relaxed venue for organic wines as well as cheeses and small plates. Next door at **Brixton**, antler light fixtures and fireplaces evoke a cozy English “lodge” where diners order British fare like curries and beer-battered fish and chips. The roof deck has a skyline view and a heated “glass-house” for cold weather. At the dimly lit **1905**, absinthe cocktails, comfort food (brunch waffles with truffled grits), velveteen décor and an environment fit for all ages make this second-story bistro a hidden gem of Shaw.

See *Dining* (page 32) and *Entertainment listings* (page 37).